

VZCZCXRO4575
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2996 2610922
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 170922Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9457
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002996

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2018
TAGS: [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: WOMEN'S AFFAIRS MINISTER CRITICIZES MALE-DOMINATED
GOI, PREPARES FOR CHALLENGES AHEAD

Classified By: By Deputy Political Counselor Steven Walker for reasons
1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) Minister of State for Women's Affairs (MoSWA) Dr. Nawal Hamed Majed Al-Samara'e did not mince words in her criticism of Iraqi politicians and the male-dominated GOI. Al-Samara'e asserted that few men in the GOI regard women's issues as even a second-tier priority and believes the exploitation of women unaware of their rights by their male relatives, as well as politicians, is a national shame. Women CoR members' failure to address women's issues in a concerted manner also arouses Al-Samara'e ire, but she acknowledges that even if female politicians united, they would simply be ignored by their male counterparts. Al-Samara'e is determined to introduce legislation that will make women's political and social rights, and their right to education and adequate healthcare a national priority for the long-term. End summary.

Education Is the First Priority

12. (C) In a September 10 meeting with Poloff, Al-Samara'e expressed high hopes for her current collaboration with the Ministry of Education on a literacy program for women that will also include civil and political awareness training, health and pre-natal care information. She said the comprehensive program will be launched nationwide in 2009. Currently NGOs around Iraq are conducting basic literacy courses for women, but Al-Samara'e stressed that the GOI should be responsible for educating women, including those past school-leaving age. Al-Samara'e asserted that Iraqi women's ignorance of their rights under Islamic law has resulted in their flagrant exploitation by male relatives and politicians alike. The worst off were women from vulnerable segments of society, such as the destitute, low-income widows, and orphans. Women's rights abuses included depriving women of their due inheritance by forcing them to sign it away to male relatives and of material support they were entitled to if summarily divorced by their husbands.

GOI Inherently Anti-Female

13. (C) Al-Samara'e asked, "What can you do with a speaker of parliament (CoR Speaker Mashadani) who does not believe that women should participate in provincial council elections?" She asserted that the GOI leadership was not serious about mandating a women's quota for the CoR and provincial councils, claiming it hopes to skirt the issue by having religious leaders issue a fatwa that would discount the need for writing a women's parliamentary quota into law.

14. (C) On the other hand, Al-Samara'e faulted women

politicians and GOI members for failing to agree on and work toward shared objectives. She dismissed the idea of a CoR women's caucus as a futile undertaking. Even if the women were able cooperate and lobby for women's interests, which according to Al-Samara'e they are not, their proposals would simply be ignored by male politicians.

Comment

15. (C) Al-Samara'e, a Sunni Muslim member of Tawafuq, was nominated by the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) to the CoR in 2005 after Sunni parties boycotted the 2005 election, but were assigned a specific number of seats. She is a medical doctor with experience in obstetrics and has worked in hospitals in her home province of Mosul and in clinics for women and children in Baghdad. She was appointed MoSWA in July 2008. She is very concerned with the problems faced by Iraqi women, especially the poor and rural. If the critical stance toward the business-as-usual attitude of the GOI's attitude towards women's issues and the fighting spirit she demonstrated in this brief meeting are indicative of how she will lead her Ministry, then we can expect some real progress in women's education and welfare in the coming year.
CROCKER